

The ANU Observer

Editorial Policy

1. Introduction

2. Journalistic Standards

2.1. Press Council

All written media produced under the ANU Observer masthead should aim to comply with the [Press Council Guidelines](#) and the [Press Council Principles](#)

2.2. Sources and comments

2.2.1. On/Off Record Statements

The reporter should always confirm whether comments made are on the record before printing. If the source does not clarify, the comments are assumed to be off the record. The reporter may later request the source provide on-record status to any comments.

2.2.2. Public Comments

Comments made in the public sphere are considered automatically on the record, i.e. comments made in a public meeting, a publicly visible online forum, or a press release. To determine if a comment was made in the public sphere, consider whether any given person could have heard the comment if they wished.

2.2.3. Source Protection

The well-being of sources should always be considered. In such a case as a source provides information which may be harmful to the source if printed, the reporter should identify this with the source and confirm they understand the potential implications.

2.2.4. Anonymity

Sources may be granted anonymity for their comments if requested. If a source asks for anonymity before or during the provision of comment or information, the source must be granted anonymity. If the source requests anonymity after provision of comment or information, the request must be brought to the Editors, who may decide.

2.3. Sourcing of facts and claims

2.3.1. Facts

All facts reported in print must be the best possible representations of the true nature of a situation or occurrence. The reporter should go to

all reasonable lengths to ascertain the accuracy of a fact. As a rule, facts should be verified through double-confirmation, that is, confirmed by two sources, both with reasonable access to the information, who have not themselves communicated or shared information. A fact which does not hold to this standard may be reported as 'unconfirmed', 'alleged', or 'reported', with the permission of an Editor.

2.3.2. Claims

Claims made by individuals, groups or organisations must be attributed to the source of those claims. All claims must be fact-checked by the reporter, and if claims are demonstrably untrue, this should be made clear in print.

2.3.3. Generalities

At times reporting may require discussion of the opinion or mood of a large, non-organised group, or the general public; i.e. "the crowd was restless and displeased", "attendees of the meeting were jubilant". In this case, the reporter may use best judgement to ascertain the details. As a rule, the reporter should avoid attributing anything more specific than a mood or tendency to a group without a spokesperson. For example "The post created controversy and backlash on the group ANU Stalkerspace" is acceptable, whereas "ANU Stalkerspace was highly critical of the post, and took issue with the use of derogatory language" is too specific.

2.4. Bias

2.4.1. Identifying Bias

Reporters and Editors should always strive to identify bias in any work, including but not limited to:

- Emotive arguments made in the voice of the Reporter
- Not presenting the best possible form of the argument for a particular side
- Exclusion of facts or sources which aid a particular perspective

2.4.2. Response to Bias

If bias in an article is minor, the editor may simply identify and request the bias be removed. If bias is major, or if bias is not removed after identification, the reporter must be taken off the story, and the completion of the article assigned to another reporter.

2.5. Corrections

2.5.1. Validation

Where an individual points out a factual error in a story, the reporter must consider whether the individual correcting the story has or could plausibly have better information than the sources used. The reporter may also further question the individual on the source of their information if it is not apparent. The reporter should also consider whether the individual has a personal interest in seeing the story altered per their correction. If the individual correcting has valid information and is not biased, the reporter must request an Editor correct the story.

2.5.2. Response

The reporter should always respond to the individual offering a correction, either to confirm the correction has occurred, or explain why it hasn't. All corrections must be recorded.

3. Reporting Areas

3.1. Areas of focus

Reporters should focus on the following areas of reporting that are of priority to *Observer*:

- ANU policy
- Halls of Residence
- Campus buildings and stores
- Student culture and community
- Higher education
- Substantive student politics

3.2. Areas avoided

The following areas are not encouraged as areas of investigation for *Observer*:

- Non-campus politics
- Individual students' academic misconduct etc.
- Drama, infighting, or personality conflict within student organisations that does not substantively impact the student community at large
- Any matters relating to other campus media organisations

4. Media Approval

4.1. Formal Approval

- 4.2. An article may be approved for publication by any Editor
- 4.3. All Editors must be made aware of an article before publication
- 4.4. Any Editor may veto initial approval of an article, at which time the article must be put to a vote of Editors. The article requires a simple majority to be published.

4.5. Article Process

4.5.1. Initial Proof

Once completed, an article must be proofed by a reporter or editor who did not write the article for grammar, spelling and other proof edits

4.5.2. Copy Edit

The article must then be submitted to the relevant Editor for copy-editing. The Editor must consider structure and identify any bias.

4.5.3. Fact-Check

An Editor or Reporter must fact-check all claims and facts made in the story.

4.5.4. Final Proof

An Editor must make a final proof for grammar and spelling before approving the article for publication.

5. Conflicts of Interest

5.1. What to Declare

- 5.1.1. Any person contributing to the production of published materials must declare all conflicts or potential conflicts of interest publically.
- 5.1.2. Conflicts of interest should be constantly updated as they arise.
- 5.1.3. In relation to news journalism, a conflict of interest is a situation where a writer's prior experience (mostly in an official capacity) has the potential to bias their writing on a particular subject. Declaring conflicts of interest avoids damaging *Observer's* journalistic credibility.

- 5.1.4. Conflicts of interest must be considered for their potential, not their actuality in the situation. That is, an involvement which *could* be a conflict, in any circumstance, must be declared.
- 5.1.5. Conflicts of interest should be considered with regards to perception, not reality. Even if there is no actual conflict, the possible perception of one is a legitimate reason to act on the conflict.
- 5.1.6. Where possible, the reporter should avoid writing articles in which they have a conflict. If conflict is identified after the story has begun, it should if reasonable be assigned to another reporter.
- 5.1.7. Where unavoidable, conflicts should be declared in a disclaimer at the end of an article.
- 5.1.8. Issues which require conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to:
 - Membership of political organisations at any level
 - Membership of clubs or any other student organisations
 - Past or current residence at an ANU hall of residence
 - Close personal relationships with any person heavily involved in reportable areas of student life

5.2. Form of Declaration

Conflict of Interest declarations should be published in full on the ANU Observer website. Any conflicts specific to an article should be included at the end of that article.

6. Conduct of Reporters

6.1. Interviews and Meetings

- 6.1.1. The reporter should remain calm, civil and respectful at all times in the course of their reporting.
- 6.1.2. No individual should be harshly questioned or pressed for comment if they appear incapacitated by stress, anxiety, or otherwise in a state in which questioning would cause undue harm.
- 6.1.3. Any individual has the right to refuse to speak to the reporter. The reporter should not question further an individual who has specifically demanded they not be questioned, except if that person is in a meeting or context in which they are specifically required to answer questions, i.e. delivering reports at SRC.

6.2. Online

- 6.2.1. Reporters should maintain a civil and respectful presence in public online spaces at all times.
- 6.2.2. Reporters should not comment on any details of an article not mentioned in that article
- 6.2.3. Reporters should not engage in online arguments concerning the contents of any article published by ANU Observer.